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ABSTRACT

African nations can only hope to make drastic changes in their societies through education of their young and, just as importantly, by providing library services through extension programs to those adults, however non literate, that comprise the producers and decision makers in the present social structure. These people need functional information for survival; for the judicious use of civic and political rights; for their social, cultural, and religious activities; and for educational information to adapt to social and cultural change. It should be noted that all developed nations at one time or another have used libraries to extend literacy and education to their illiterate populations; Africa can hardly afford to do otherwise. (RAA)

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PROVISION OF LIBRARY SERVICE TO NON LITERATES

by

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PROVISION OF LIBRARY SERVICE TO NON LITERATES

by F. Adetowun Ogunsheye

INTRODUCTION

There is a seeming contradiction in the topic of this paper, Library Service to Non Literates. If libraries are concerned with acquisition of books and recorded knowledge, how can they provide for the needs of a client that is not literate and therefore incapable of benefiting from the recorded resources of the library? The idea of library service to non literates in Nigeria, as far as I am aware, was first aired at the Third Annual Conference of the Western Nigeria Library Association in March 1966.[1] Before then Nwikina,[2] before a meeting of the old West African Library Association, discussed the problem of the library service to the new literates in the fifties. Even in 1966, library service to non literates seemed an impossible and far fetched idea, when the provision of library service to the literate minority was considered a luxury. I believe the conference listened politely to my proposition and put it down as another unrealistic idea of a library educator not conversant with the problems of the practising librarian.

The seventies were declared the decade for eradicating illiteracy by the United Nations and innumerable projects on functional literacy were launched[3]

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1. Ogunsheye, F.A., Service to Non Literates. Western Nigeria Library Bulletin v.III, no.1, 19-22, July 1966.

2. Nwikina, G., WALA News.

3. Barage, M.L.A., Rural Libraries in functional literacy campaigns, UNESCO Bulletin for Libraries, XXVI, 1:18-24, January/February 1972.

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in Latin America and parts of Africa.[4] All these activities however were designed toward service to adult literacy activities and their products - the new literates.

This paper goes further to advocate extension of library service to non literates whether they are in a literacy programme or not. Libraries should continue to give service to functional literacy programmes and their students, but there is also a strong case for the extension of their services to the non literates who form the majority in the new nations of Africa.

THE CASE FOR LIBRARY SERVICE TO NON LITERATES

The last twenty years since 1960 have witnessed the almost total liberation of Africa from colonial rule and the emergence of 53 independent African states. In spite of the U.N. declaration of the seventies as the decade for the eradication of illiteracy, the effect of the efforts in this direction in many African states has not been spectacular. The lack of adequate funds, the shortage of trained personnel to implement a massive functional literacy programme, and the reluctance or rejection of western type education by some ethnic groups have remained some of the major constraints in the implementation of the literacy projects. This situation notwithstanding, the young states in Africa are required to function as modern states interpreting their constitution, maintaining laws through the judiciary, administering for the good of the majority through the executive, and operating the legislatures for formulating policy and making laws and regulations. In addition, these young states have to cope with the

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[4]UNESCO Meeting of Experts on Planning Documentation and Library Services in Africa, Kampala, 1970, p. 24.

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demands of membership of international organizations and rules and procedures for international relations. The extent to which the educated minority can perform these functions effectively depends on the stability of the new states. This is determined by the use of the vote by the non literate majority; their understanding and appreciation of governmental action; their commitment and contribution to the national wealth; their acceptance of the authority of existing government and cooperation in maintaining law and order and stability. The non literate members have to be assisted to meet these damands of a modern state, through information, education and a two way communication between them and their governments.

A nation's wealth depends on the total contribution of every adult to the economy. If the non literate majority are left to farm with primitive implements, the country will not produce enough to feed itself. If they are not equipped to cope with the economic demands of a modern economy, the national industrial development programme will not take off. It is therefore in the interest of the whole nation that the non literate majority should be assisted to become economically productive. There has been much instability in Aftica, the manifestations of which are the coups, the spate of military governments, and the bloody transition from one to the other. It can be speculated that this state of affairs has emerged because there has been lack of social and political education and therefore lack of preparation of the non literate majority for the new situation. This has made them victims and tools of the ambitious minority elite- military or civilian hungry for power at all costs. They have therefore not participated positively in the choice and operations of governments.

Besides the demands of a nations evolving, the non literate majority also has to contend with the impact of social and cultural change. The lack of information about the various ethnic groups, fear of domination, unhealthy spitit of competition for economic and political power divorced from merit and competence, have led to unhealthy rivalry,ethnic suspicion and intra-state conflicts. There could be an educative function that libraries in collaboration with other agencies, adult education and community development, can perform to inform and educate the non literate majority, so that intra-ethnic fear and ignorance and suspicion are minimized, if not completely removed. Besides the intra state cultural confrontation which the non literates have to contend with there is also the confrontation with the external world. The new modern values and norms alienate the youths fro the local culture and often from their parents. How is the non literate parent expected to make the transition from an authoritative, strict and loyalty based code of ethics, to the modern methods of persuasion, discussion, the libertarian orientation and values that Western type education bring along with its superior knowledge of science and technology.

The evolution of modern state must profoundly affect the life of the non literate. How so we help him understand that the land inherited from his ancestors, where many of them are buried, can be legally acquired by governments; that they can be dispossessed of it; that the land can be flooded with an artifical lake thus removing them forever from their roots in the name of progress? how do non literates whose fishing waters are polluted by oil spills cope with the problems of making an alternative livelihood? If he moves into the urban areas,how does he cope with high rents, traffic problems in

congested urban areas, water shortage, absence of conveniences, etc. These are situations where he needs to be literate and numerate to survive. Whether the non literate is a member of an oil rich or nationally poor state, he still has to cope with the problem of individual survival. He needs to be educated for economic and social changes in the nation. The foregoing establishes that the non literates have information needs which must be met not only in their own interest, but in the national interest so that the non literate majority may contribute to national wealth and social development, instead of being a liability retarding development.

THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF THE NON LITERATE

The information needs of the non literate are similar to the information needs of the literate. These can be grouped under the following four headings:

a. functional information for economic survival
b. functional survival information for the judicious exercise of civic and political rights and acceptance of social responsibility
c. social and cultural information for leisure and religious observances
d. educational information for discerning and adapting to cultural and social change

INFORMATION FOR ECONOMIC SURVIVAL

Economic information needs will vary according to the geographical environment and occupation of the individual, i.e., whether the non literates are in rural or urban areas. In rural areas it can be assumed they will be farming, fishing, or animal rearing - nomadic communities. Their needs will be related to how they can increase their productivity, and earn higher incomes to enable them to meet their financial commitments to their family and the state. This is of priority, in the face of labour

shortage caused by migration of youths to towns for easier, more lucrative employment. The rural non literates will therefore need functional information on new methods of production, and application of modern technology to replace manpower. They will require modern marketing techniques, to enable them to obtain adequate economic returns for their products. They will require information on national decisions on commodity prices and must be organized to contribute to the decision making process so that such decisions can be fair and equitable.

In urban areas, the non literates require information on labour demands, wage structure, information on housing problems and rents. There is, of course, an informal channel of communication for this functional information, but such information is laced with rumours, half truths and exaggerations. An urban public information center will make life in urban areas less harrowing for the non literate. It will also ensure that they do not get swamped by problems and lured into the urban criminal world.

Civic and Political Information

Since most of the new states in Africa are operating social democratic systems of government, every adult whether literate or non literate is expected to actively participate in government. It is imperative that the non literates be educated on their civic rights and responsibilites. They must appreciate the responsibilities accompanying the selection of their government through the use of the vote. They need information on why they must pay tax and how the money, so collected, is utilized for their benefit. They need to know who the politicians are, and what

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programmes the political parties have for social development. The non literates also need information on system of government and administration and their vote as citizens. They need information on the laws and the judicial process - their rights in the constitution and their responsibilities as citizens.

Social and Cultural Information

It is often assumed that the non literate is well informed on social and cultural norms and activities. This is correct in respect of the local community to which he belongs. The new states of Africa, however, consist of several ethnic groups. It is in the interest of the new nation that there should be an exchange of information on culture and customs. The new states of Africa are very culture conscious. The ministries of information have been very active in transmitting cultural information and entertainment, by television and broadcasting, by radio. The films, video tapes and sound recordings produced for these programmes are kept in lockers in the Ministeries of Culture and information libraries and are all erased for new recordings. Libraries must ensure that these records of cultural events are preserved and systematically organized for cultural education of the community and in particular for the non literate majority.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LIBRARY SERVICE IN AFRICA

The needs of the new literate delineated above pose a challenge for library service in Africa. It implies the collection of knowledge in new and non conventional formats, the processing of information in non conventional packages, and the use of audio visual media and other methods for disseminating information It may involve a drastic change in conventional library methods, but at least,

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librarians in Africa will be given relevant library service designed to educate and promote accelerated social and economic development. This calls for a new type of librarian, the public enlightenment librarian or extension service librarian.

THE NEW RESOURCES AND THEIR ORGANIZATION

The sources of information for service to non literates are not organized in the conventional reference books, even where they exist for Africa. They are current information that exist in information bulletins, pamphlets, government releases, laws, and regulations, government department directories, and reports. The public enlightenment librarian must devise new methods of identifying and collecting this public enlightenment, economic and social development information for the benefit of the non literate. Such information should be processed and indexed in packages related to need, rather than subject matter, i.e., they must be mission oriented. The processed packages should be in audio visual formats - tapes, sets of slides, films, video tapes, etc. The language of the packaged information must be the local language of the area. The official language version (French, English, or Portuguese, or Spanish) should be made available for the national depository. Thus the extension librarian in Africa will also have to be an author, generating information and knowledge. There should also be facilities for reproducing from prototypes, so that there is little duplication of effort in the production of these mission oriented information packages for the non literates. There are now commercial firms ready to invest in production of new media resource materials provided they can be assured of adquate demand. This is another reason for cooperation and collaboration, so that what is produced for groundnut farmers in Dakar or Gambia can be dubbed with local language equivalents for groundnut farmers in

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Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroons and Chad. There should be international listing of these resource packages, and if possible a regional depository center in Africa for reproduction and loan.

NEW DISSEMINATION METHODS

The traditional library has always waited for its clientele to come to the library or phone in and make requests for a book or a reference. The extension librarian in Africa will have to go out to the clients in an 'outreach' programme. It will be necessary for an extension library to identify a specific group of non literates to work with and work for. The extension librarian will need first to study the group so identified, and, in collaboration with them and other agencies, determine their needs, their aspirations and priorities. Only from such preliminary study can the extension librarian decide on the area, scope and category of service.

The librarian will also need to collaborate with other agencies working with the non literates. These could be educational, agricultural, medical agencies or other agencies concerned with development of the group. If the group selected is engaged in functional literacy activities, then the librarian should be a close member of the literacy education team. If the group is engaged in an agricultural development project, then the extension librarian must collect material relevant to the agricultural project and work with agricultural extension workers. The librarian may also have to collaborate with the health unit teams and the information division and social workers to carry out a relevant community objective.

The actual dissemination of information will involve using radio and television where they exist. It will, however, be more realistic to use

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information assistants, working under the extension librarians, who will provide information on request just as library assistants provide books or references on request. The extension librarian's office or centre should be situated in and be part of the community centre. He should also be backed by a strong established library service. All these proposals have implications for new professional orientation and training.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSION AND TRAINING OF MANPOWER

The professional orientation of service to the literate community will have to be altered to include service to the whole community. The language of the library will have to be the national language as well as the local language of the community, where the library is situated.

There is need for training to identify the new information resources, to collect them and systematically organize and present them in packages that can be utilized by non literates. This calls for ingenuity, innovation and ability to adapt and adopt new methods.

There is also the problem of acceptance of the new role of the librarian. There are bound to be conflicts and misunderstanding with related agencies, social development, health assistants, etc. If the extension librarian refrains from confusing his role of information provider for educational objectives, health and agricultural projects, with that of the educationist, the agricultural extension worker, and the public health worker, then there will be no problem. He will still, however, have to educate the agencies and the clients on his role, as information provider and gain their confidence and cooperation. The second problem is concerned with financing. Library service to non literates is not going to be cheap. The Library will still have to provide the conventional resources in the form of books and records to back up the service. Then these

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will have to be collected and organized into packages of non book formats, that can be utilized by or for non literates. There will have to be considerable public relations work educating the officials, who formulate policy and disburse library funds, persuading them that the extra expenditure is worth while and that it is in the national interest to provide the new literates with library service and the non literates with information service.

INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

UNESCO has already accepted the needs of the new literates. As early as 1970[5] it established over twelve world pilot projects of adult literacy. In Equador, where it sponsored such a project, the public library[6] offered functional reading material on maize projection, for example, and consulted and advised the teachers and agricultural officers on suitable reading materials, with suggestions on techniques of making readers interested. The Library also provided translation services for languages not understood by its clientele, therefore, providing service for non literates. Africa has had its share of functional literacy programmes, but the library has not been active in its support of these programmes, except in Tanzania. Here library service was planned as ancillary service, for the adult education and rural development programme designated as the priority for the second Development plan 1969-1972.[7]

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[5]UNESCO meeting of experts on Planning of National Documentation and Library Services in Africa. Kampala 1970, p. 24.

[6]Albertus, U., Role of Libraries in the Functional Literacy Programme: Library Service for New Literates. UNESCO/Bulletin for Libraries 24: 201-4, July 1970.

[7]Arunsi, N.O., Library and Adult Education in Tanzania: A survey in A.B. Walleuius, ed., Libraries in East Africa. Upsalla. Africans Publications Corporation, 1971, pp. 83-124.

The Tanzania Library Services planned a network of branch libraries and mobile libraries to provide textbooks to adult education students and programmes[8] in the Uguana villages. These are services in respect of adults who are in literacy programmes but also for those who were not yet literate.[9] There are many adults in Africa, who do not have the opportunity to be in a literacy programme, but who need information for survival. These non literates should also have access to information, that will improve their lives and that of the nation, of which they are members.

It is here recommended that these library services to adult functional literacy programmes, be extended to the whole community. UNESCO should be urged to assist in the extension of such services and the evolving of a training programme for the new literates and the new extension librarians.

The IFLA Regional Group for Africa, should sponsor a conference or workshop on implications of library service to non literates for the training of librarians and the development of information resources required to implement such services. I take this opportunity to bring to the notice of African libraries the decisions of library educators taken in 1974 at Dakar - that audio visual aids be part of library education programs in Africa and that training of the local language specialist should be pursued.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can only hope to make accelerated drastic changes in African societies, not only by educating the young, but by educating and

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[8]Nilsson, Library and Adult Education in Tanzania, a discussion in Walleuius, op. cit., pp. 53-82.

[9]Baregu, M.L.M., Rural Libraries in Functional Literacy Campaigns, UNESCO/ Bulletin for Libraries XXVI, 1:18-24, January/February 1972.

informing the adults who are now the producers and decision makers; by the provision of information relevant to economic and social activities of the non literates, as an educative function. Libraries will have to accept this challenge, if they are desirous of transforming the societies of Africa from weak pre-industrial societies into strong, national, developed industrial and information oriented societies.

It is interesting to note that Western developed countries have used Libraries for literacy and education of the illiterate population at one time or the other in their history. The early church used Libraries in Great Britain,[10] Lenin used 'mass' Libraries in Russia as Information Centres for the peasant population.[11] In modern times Monroe[12] describes work with illiterates and the "operation alphabet" in Philadelphia and New Haven, U.S.A. Another development in the U.S.A. is the 'community oriented' rather than book oriented services which are being offered in outreach project. If developed countries find it necessary to take care of their non literate minorities, Africa can hardly afford to ignore its non literate majority.

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[11] Chandler, George, Libraries, Documentation and Bibliography in the U.S.S.R. 1917-1971. London: Seminar Press, 1972, pp. 16-29.

[12] Monroe, Margaret, New Patterns of Library Service, Library Journal 19: 363, March 15, 1966.

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